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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 001139

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTH OSSETIA CONTINUES BLOCKADE OF TRANSCAUCASIAN
HIGHWAY

REF: TBILISI 1120

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 15, OSCE Ambassador Roy Reeve told Ambassador that the South Ossetians continue to block the Transcaucasian Highway north of Tskhinvali, but all of the other side roads have been re-opened. Reeve said that de-facto president Kokoity has returned to Tskhinvali and the OSCE representative in Tskhinvali met with him to raise OSCE concerns about the restrictions the South Ossetians had imposed on JPKF and OSCE monitors' freedom of movement, particularly in the area around the Georgian village of Avnevi. Reeve said Russian envoy Popov will arrive in Tskhinvali on May 15. The South Ossetian de-facto foreign

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minister Murat Jioev sent a letter to a group of western Ambassadors inviting them to meet with Kokoiti in the third week of May. On May 14, Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Valeri Chechelashvili told DCM that at the May 15 JCC, the Georgian side would continue to welcome direct talks with Kokoity. He also said the Georgians were disappointed with the response of the Russian Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) to the fighting and said the Russian government should press their peacekeepers to actively enforce their mandate. End Summary

South Ossetia continues Transcaucasian Highway blockade

¶2. (SBU) OSCE Ambassador Reeve told Ambassador that the South Ossetians continue to block the Transcaucasian Highway north of Tskhinvali. The road has been blocked with concrete barriers, he said, preventing free passage, but the Ossetians have re-opened all of the side roads. He hinted, however, that the blockade may be affecting the South Ossetians as much as the Georgian villages to the north, joking that Tskhinvali was starting to run out of tomatoes and cucumbers.

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Kokoity back in Tskhinvali

¶3. (SBU) Reeve also told Ambassador that de-facto president Kokoity has returned from Moscow. He said that the OSCE representative in Tskhinvali met with Kokoity to raise OSCE's concerns about the South Ossetians restricting access to all areas in the Zone of Conflict (ZOC), particularly the area around the Georgian village of Avnevi, where large groups of armed Ossetian militia have been reported (reftel). Reeve said Kokoity told the OSCE representative that he would discuss the issue with the leaders of his security forces. Reeve added that Russian envoy Popov would be arriving later in the day.

¶4. (SBU) On May 14, Deputy Foreign Minister Chechelashvili

told DCM that at the May 15 JCC, the Georgians would continue to request talks with Kokoity. He said that the Georgians were disappointed with the way the Russian JPKF responded to the fighting over the weekend. It would be helpful, he said, if the Russian government pushed their peacekeepers to more actively enforce their mandate, which includes conducting patrols and establishing temporary posts when fighting breaks out. He added that when the Russian peacekeepers play an active role, they can be effective in restraining South Ossetian forces.

Comment

15. (C) Currently the situation in the ZOC is quiet, though until the JPKF and OSCE are allowed safe and unhindered access to all areas in the ZOC, including the area surrounding the Georgian village of Avnevi, tensions will remain high. As Embassy DAO has reported separately, (septel) the Georgian army has not gone on alert during the crisis, and the GoG reaction to date has been calm in the face Ossetian provocations. In response to Jioev's invitation to meet with Kokoity, we will coordinate with other western Ambassadors to see how we might usefully promote a scaling back of the confrontation between the sides. Preliminary discussion with European Ambassadors indicated a preference for a written reply urging disengagement and demilitarization but no, repeat no, visit to Tskhinvali.
TEFFT